

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Ernst Ralf Hintz. *Learning and Persuasion in the German Middle Ages*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1997. xii + 206 pp. \$50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8153-2182-8.

Reviewed by William C. Crossgrove (Departments of German Studies and Comparative Literatures, Brown University)

Published on H-German (August, 1998)

*Learning and Persuasion in the German Middle Ages* is more specific in its focus than the title suggests. It opens with a chapter on "Concepts of Learning and Teaching from Augustine to Hrabanus Maurus" (pp. 3-42) and then seeks to show how teaching styles advocated by Augustine, Gregory the Great, and Hrabanus Maurus are exemplified in a few medieval German texts from the ninth through twelfth centuries. One chapter is devoted to each text or, in one case, group of texts: "Muspilli" (pp. 43-78), "Memento mori" (pp. 79-102), the poems of Frau Ava (pp. 103-37), and "Von den letzten Dingen" (pp. 139-79). There is a brief conclusion, followed by a bibliography and an index. In all, there are 140 pages of text and 430 notes, placed at the end of each chapter, taking up thirty-seven pages. Hintz justifies the selection of texts "because of their short to moderate length, which accentuates their narrative and teaching strategies" and because they "provide a common ground for comparative analysis due to their common theme: the Call to Judgment" (p. xi).

Readers seeking general information on learning and teaching in medieval Germany will find useful references and discussions in the endnotes but will soon discover that this monograph is primarily a literary analysis based on close reading of the texts. Hintz makes assumptions about the intended audiences for the texts, supported by references to the manuscripts in which the texts are transmitted and to previous scholarship, but no new evidence about teaching methods or audience is presented except through the explication of the texts. There is no discussion of non-poetic texts, most notably those of Notker of St. Gall, that consciously struggle with the problem of transmitting knowledge to native speakers of German forced to work in the language of monastic learning. Nor is there any discussion of the probable education of lay persons in cathedral schools. The focus is instead on the transmission of Christian values through vernacular poetry.

Hintz provides a detailed analysis of Augustine's pro-

gram of Christian instruction as outlined in "De doctrina christiana," argues that salient parts are especially highlighted in Gregory's "Regula pastoralis" at the beginning of the medieval period, and observes that "De clericorum institutione" by Hrabanus Maurus especially fostered Augustinian concepts in German-speaking lands. By choosing to focus on texts centering around the Last Judgment, Hintz is able a) to begin with "Muspilli," an enigmatic and fragmentary ninth century text related both to early medieval biblical epic and to Germanic alliterative verse and b) to highlight the use of what he calls "salutary" or "saving" fear, the technique of scaring the audience into Christian virtue by outlining in graphic detail the horrors that await those who reject Christ. This gives him ample opportunity to find examples of the use of *affectus* as recommended by Augustine, Gregory, and Hrabanus Maurus. Hintz typically divides passages into "preceptive verses," those that provide direct guidance for Christians, and "exemplary verses," those that teach by positive or negative example.

The term "saving fear" becomes familiar by repetition, but the constant adjectival use of present participles still brings the reader up short at times in phrases such as "the effects of saving conversion" (p. 138) or "in accord with saving reason" (p. 174) where one has to think about whether something saves or is being saved. There are other examples of erroneous, stilted, or misleading vocabulary choice: "bare false witness" (p. 56), "judgment pronouncement" for "verdict" (pp. 59, 63), "renouncement" for "renunciation" (p. 61), or "inconsequence" for "inconsistency" (p. 92). Typographical errors and inconsistencies in footnote citations and bibliographical entries are also not infrequent. "Lapidge" with no first name in an entry for an article by Michael Lapidge (p. 192) and variable capitalization of adjectives in German titles are two examples.

The putative audiences are difficult to identify very precisely, ranging from unspecified "learners with no or

little command of Latin” (p. 47) in the Frankish Church (“Muspilli”) to “a mainly aristocratic lay audience” (p. 79) for the “Memento mori,” individuals who might seek guidance from a recluse in the case of Frau Ava (pp. 104-5), and unspecified listeners for the last text, poems about the Antichrist and the Last Judgment from a manuscript now kept in the State Library at Linz (Austria). The “charismatic culture” so characteristic of eleventh century cathedral schools according to C. Stephen Jaeger (*The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950-1020*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994) might have provided a useful point of comparison to the kind of teaching Hintz sees as occurring through vernacular poetry, but it does not appear in the otherwise extensive bibliography.

The explication of rhetorical structures employed within each text to provide guidance to Christian listeners is informative and makes a plausible case for the use of this poetry in a teaching mission as Hintz describes it. As with most literary analysis based on close reading of selected texts, however, the reader who is not an expert in the field has no easy way of judging whether

other early medieval German poetry also draws on the same tradition for rhetorical strategies or whether other Latin authors offer strategies so different that the Augustinian roots explored by Hintz are as uniquely identifiable as he implies. I am somewhat skeptical on both of these points, but Hintz has provided stimulating ideas for future researchers to test against other texts. There is no lack of documentation for his arguments, with an average of more than three footnotes per page of text, including some rather lengthy ones in which he demonstrates his knowledge of previous scholarship.

In spite of the criticisms stated or implied above, Hintz deserves credit for tackling a difficult corpus of texts produced in an era from which we lack basic sources for many kinds of information that we take for granted in later periods. Scholars who work in Old High German and Early Middle High German literature will learn much from reading his monograph.

Copyright (c) 1998 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@H-Net.MSU.EDU.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:  
<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl>.

**Citation:** William C. Crossgrove. Review of Hintz, Ernst Ralf, *Learning and Persuasion in the German Middle Ages*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. August, 1998.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=2211>

Copyright © 1998 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu).